

Worldwide Caution

February 2, 2009

This Worldwide Caution updates information on the continuing threat of terrorist actions and violence against Americans and interests throughout the world. In some countries, the worldwide recession has contributed to political and economic instability and social unrest. The armed conflict between Israeli forces and Hamas in Gaza, which began in December 2008, raised tensions and sparked demonstrations throughout the world. U.S. citizens and others were killed in recent terrorist attacks in India and Pakistan. American citizens are reminded to maintain a high level of vigilance and to take appropriate steps to increase their security awareness. This replaces the Worldwide Caution dated July 16, 2008 to provide updated information on security threats and terrorist activities worldwide.

The Department of State remains concerned about the continued threat of terrorist attacks, demonstrations, and other violent actions against U.S. citizens and interests overseas. Americans are reminded that demonstrations and rioting can occur with little or no warning. Current information suggests that al-Qaida and affiliated organizations continue to plan terrorist attacks against U.S. interests in multiple regions, including Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. These attacks may employ a wide variety of tactics including suicide operations, assassinations, kidnappings, hijackings, and bombings. The September 2006 attack on the U.S. Embassy in Syria and the March 2006 bombing near the U.S. Consulate in Karachi, Pakistan illustrate the continuing desire of extremists to strike American targets.

Extremists may elect to use conventional or non-conventional weapons, and target both official and private interests. Examples of such targets include high-profile sporting events, residential areas, business offices, hotels, clubs, restaurants, places of worship, schools, public areas, and locales where Americans gather in large numbers, including during holidays. Terrorists attacked two hotels, a railway station, restaurant, hospital, and other locations in Mumbai, India, frequented by Westerners on November 26, 2008. Over 100 persons are believed to have been killed, including six Americans, and hundreds were injured. On September 20, terrorist bombed the Islamabad Marriott Hotel killing two U.S. Department of Defense employees and one Department of State contractor, whose remains are still unaccounted for. One private American sustained minor injuries. A July 9, 2008, terrorist attack on Turkish police guarding the U.S. Consulate General in Istanbul, Turkey, killed three police officers and wounded other police personnel. On March 15, 2008, a bomb at an Italian restaurant in Islamabad, Pakistan, killed two and injured twelve, including five Americans. Also on March 15, two bombs exploded at the CS Pattani Hotel in southern Thailand, killing two and injuring thirteen.

Americans are reminded of the potential for terrorists to attack public transportation systems. Bombs exploded near city buses in Tripoli, Lebanon, on August 13 and September 29, 2008, killing twenty-one people. Other examples include multiple anti-personnel mine detonations on passenger buses in June 2008 in Sri Lanka, multiple terrorist attacks on trains in India in 2006, the July 2005 London Underground bombings, and the March 2004 train attacks in Madrid. Extremists also may select aviation and maritime services as possible targets, such as the August 2006 plot against aircraft in London, or the December 2006 bomb at Madrid's Barajas International Airport. In June 2007, a vehicle was driven into the main terminal at Glasgow International Airport and burst into flames, but the bomb failed to detonate.

The Middle East and North Africa

Credible information indicates terrorist groups seek to continue attacks against U.S. interests in the Middle East and North Africa. Terrorist actions may include bombings, hijackings, hostage taking, kidnappings, and assassinations. While conventional weapons such as explosive devices are a more immediate threat in many areas, use of non-conventional weapons, including chemical or biological agents, must be considered a possible threat. Terrorists do not distinguish between official and civilian targets. Increased security at official U.S. facilities has led terrorists and their sympathizers to seek softer targets such as public transportation, residential areas, and public areas where people congregate, including restaurants, hotels, clubs, and shopping areas.

On September 17, 2008, armed terrorists attacked the U.S. Embassy in Sana'a, Yemen, killing several Yemeni personnel, one embassy security guard, and a few individuals waiting to gain entry to the embassy. On March 18, 2008, a mortar attack on the U.S. Embassy in Yemen injured several Yemeni citizens in the vicinity. On January 15, 2008, a roadside explosion in Beirut, Lebanon killed three Lebanese and injured an American citizen. On December 11, 2007, two vehicle-borne explosive devices were detonated at the UN headquarters in Algiers and the Algerian Constitutional Council. Three suicide bomb attacks in July and September of 2007 in Algeria killed more than 80 people. In July 2007, suspected al-Qaida operatives carried out a vehicle-borne explosive device attack on tourists at the Bilquis Temple in Yemen, killing eight Spanish tourists and their two Yemeni drivers. There were a series of bombings in Morocco in March and April 2007, two of which occurred simultaneously outside the U.S. Consulate General and the private American Language Center in Casablanca. Additionally, an attack took place on the American International School in Gaza in April 2007. These events underscore the intent of terrorist entities to target facilities perceived to cater to Westerners.

Potential targets are not limited to those companies or establishments with overt U.S. ties. For instance, terrorists may target movie theaters, liquor stores, bars, casinos, or any similar type of establishment, regardless of whether they are owned and operated by host country nationals. Due to varying degrees of security at all such locations, Americans should be particularly vigilant when visiting these establishments.

The violence in Iraq and conflict between Palestinians and Israelis has the potential to produce demonstrations and unrest throughout the region. The armed conflict between Israeli forces and Hamas in Gaza, which began in December 2008, raised tensions and sparked demonstrations throughout the world. The Department of State continues to warn of the possibility for violent actions against U.S. citizens and interests in the region. Anti-American violence could include possible terrorist actions against aviation, ground transportation, and maritime interests, specifically in the Middle East, including the Red Sea, Persian Gulf, the Arabian Peninsula, and North Africa.

The Department is concerned that extremists may be planning to carry out attacks against Westerners and oil workers on the Arabian Peninsula. Armed attacks targeting foreign nationals in Saudi Arabia that resulted in many deaths and injuries, including U.S. citizens, appear to have been preceded by extensive surveillance. Tourist destinations in Egypt frequented by Westerners were attacked in April 2006 resulting in many deaths and injuries, including Americans. Extremists may be surveilling Westerners, particularly at hotels, housing areas, and rental car facilities. Potential targets may include U.S. contractors, particularly those related to military interests. Financial or economic venues of value also could be considered as possible targets; the failed attack on the Abqaiq oil processing facility in Saudi Arabia in late February 2006 and the September 2006 attack on oil facilities in Yemen are examples.

East Africa

A number of al-Qaida operatives and other extremists are believed to be operating in and around East Africa. As a result of the conflict in Somalia, some of these individuals may seek to relocate elsewhere in the region. Americans considering travel to the region and those already there should review their plans carefully, remain vigilant with regard to their personal security, and exercise caution. Terrorist actions may include suicide operations, bombings, kidnappings, or targeting maritime vessels. Terrorists do not distinguish between official and civilian targets. Increased security at official U.S. facilities has led terrorists to seek softer targets such as hotels, beach resorts, prominent public places, and landmarks. In particular, terrorists and likeminded extremists may target international aid workers, civil aviation, and seaports in various locations throughout East Africa, including Somalia. Americans in remote areas or border regions where military or police authority is limited or non-existent could also become targets.

Americans considering travel by sea near the Horn of Africa or in the southern Red Sea should exercise extreme caution, as there has been a notable increase in armed attacks, robberies, and kidnappings for ransom at sea by pirates in recent months. Merchant vessels continue to be hijacked in Somali territorial waters, while others have been hijacked as far as 300 nautical miles off the coast of Somalia, Yemen, and Kenya in international waters.

The U.S. Government maritime authorities advise mariners to avoid the port of Mogadishu, and to remain at least 200 nautical miles off the coast of Somalia. In addition, when transiting around the Horn of Africa or in the Red Sea, it is strongly recommended that vessels travel in convoys, and maintain good communications contact at all times. Americans traveling on commercial passenger vessels should consult with the shipping or cruise Ship Company regarding precautions that will be taken to avoid hijacking incidents. Commercial vessels should review the Department of Transportation Maritime Administration's suggested piracy countermeasures for vessels transiting the Gulf of Aden.

South and Central Asia

The U.S. Government continues to receive information that terrorist groups in South and Central Asia may be planning attacks in the region, possibly against U.S. Government facilities, American citizens, or American interests. The presence of al-Qaida, Taliban elements, indigenous sectarian groups, and other terror organizations, many of which are on the U.S. Government's list of foreign terror organizations, poses a potential danger to American citizens in the region. Continuing tensions in the Middle East may also increase the threat of anti-Western or anti-American violence in the region.

Terrorists and their sympathizers have demonstrated their willingness and capability to attack targets where Americans or Westerners are known to congregate or visit. Their actions may include, but are not limited to, vehicle-borne explosives, improvised explosive devices, assassinations, carjacking, rocket attacks, assaults or kidnappings. In November 2008, coordinated terrorist attacks on luxury hotels, a Jewish community center, a restaurant, train station, hospital, and other facilities frequented by foreigners in Mumbai, India killed more than 170, including six Americans. On November 12, 2008, an American government contractor and his driver in Peshawar, Pakistan were shot and killed in their car. In September 2008, more than fifty people, including three Americans, were killed and hundreds were injured when a suicide bomber set off a truck filled with explosives outside a major international hotel in Islamabad, Pakistan. In August 2008, gunmen stopped and shot at the vehicle of an American diplomat in Peshawar. In August, three female western non-governmental organization (NGO) employees, along with their male Afghan driver, were gunned down as they traveled south of Kabul, Afghanistan. On June 2, 2008, a large

bomb exploded in front of the Danish Embassy in Islamabad killing at least six people and wounding nearly 20. In May 2008, a series of coordinated bombings occurred in market and temple areas of the tourist city of Jaipur in Rajasthan, India. In Afghanistan, kidnappings and terrorist attacks on international organizations, international aid workers, and foreign interests continue. In Sri Lanka, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and other groups have conducted suicide bombings at political rallies, government buildings, and major economic targets, and in recent months have increasingly targeted public transportation. Although there is no indication that American citizens were targeted in these attacks, and none were injured, there is a heightened risk of American citizens being victims of violence by being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Previous terrorist attacks conducted in Central Asia have involved improvised explosive devices and suicide bombers and have targeted public areas, such as markets, local government facilities, and, in 2004, the U.S. and Israeli Embassies in Uzbekistan. In addition, hostage-takings and skirmishes have occurred near the Uzbek-Tajik-Kyrgyz border areas.

Before You Go

U.S. citizens living or traveling abroad are encouraged to register with the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate through the State Department's travel registration web site at <https://travelregistration.state.gov/ibrs/ui/> so that they can obtain updated information on travel and security. Americans without Internet access may register directly with the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate. By registering, American citizens make it easier for the Embassy or Consulate to contact them in case of emergency.

U.S. citizens are strongly encouraged to maintain a high level of vigilance, be aware of local events, and take the appropriate steps to bolster their personal security. For additional information, please refer to "A Safe Trip Abroad" found at <http://travel.state.gov>.

U.S. Government facilities worldwide remain at a heightened state of alert. These facilities may temporarily close or periodically suspend public services to assess their security posture. In those instances, U.S. embassies and consulates will make every effort to provide emergency services to U.S. citizens. Americans abroad are urged to monitor the local news and maintain contact with the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate.

As the Department continues to develop information on any potential security threats to U.S. citizens overseas, it shares credible threat information through its Consular Information Program documents, available on the Internet at <http://travel.state.gov>. In addition to information on the Internet, travelers may obtain up-to-date information on security conditions by calling 1-888-407-4747 toll-free in the United States and Canada or, outside the United States and Canada on a regular toll line at 1-202-501-4444. These numbers are available from 8:00 am to 8:00 pm Monday through Friday, Eastern Time (except U.S. federal holidays.)